

COLUMBIA COUNTY GEORGIA

DRAFT

Parks and Recreation System Comprehensive Master Plan

Spring 2002

Table of Contents

Section 1. Introduction

- Background
- Purpose of the Planning Process
- Planning Methodology

Section 2. History and Research

- Columbia County
 - Columbia County History
 - Local Government
- Demographic Characteristics
 - Population Growth
 - 1990 - 2000 Growth Areas
 - Demographic Analysis
- Previous Planning Efforts

Section 3. Public Input Process

- Overview
- Needs Assessment
- Citizens' Steering Committee
- Citizens' Steering Committee Workshop
 - Question 1. Five most critical issues
 - Question 2. Strengths of the department
 - Question 3. Weaknesses of the department
- Public Meetings
- User Survey

Section 4. Recreation and Leisure Services Department Analysis and Recommendations

- Organizational Structure
 - Current Organization
 - Organizational Structure Recommendations
 - Administration Division
 - Special Services Division
 - Marketing and Public Relations Section
 - Savannah Rapids Pavilion and Rentals Section
 - Wildwood Park and Marina Operations Section
 - Aquatics Section
 - Cultural Affairs Section
 - Recreation Division
 - Analysis
 - Level of Service
 - Communication and Public Input
 - Volunteers and Partnerships



Program Diversity
District Organization
Community Centers Section
Recreation Programs Section
Maintenance Division

Budget and Salaries
Current Budget Evaluation
Budget Recommendations
Philosophy Statement
Policy Development
Fees and Charges Procedure Recommendations
Salaries

Section 5. Park and Recreation National Standards and Analysis

Park Classification System
Mini-Parks
Special Use Parks
Neighborhood Parks
Community Parks
Regional Parks
Greenways
Acreage Standards
Facility Standards
Other Community Standards and National Trends
Existing Facility Analysis and Recommendations
Parking Standards
Design Standards
Park Signage
Basketball in Parking Lots
Playground Safety Standards
Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
Security and Vandalism
Community Swimming Pools
Parks and Recreation Division Office
New Park Construction
Neighborhood Parks
Park/School Sites
Consolidation - Columbia County Parks and Recreation Department and
City Parks and Recreation Departments

Existing Facility Analysis and Recommendations
Appling Park
Blanchard Park
Harlem Park
Patriots Park
Riverside Park
Reed Creek Park

Roberts Park
Savannah Rapids Pavilion
Wildwood Park
Euchee Creek (Bessie Thomas) Community Center
Eubank Blanchard Community Center

Grovetown City Park - Goodale Park
Grovetown City Park - Newmantown Park
Private Park - Little League Park
Georgia State Park - Mistletoe

Section 6. New Facility Land Acquisition and Recommendations

District 1
District 2
District 3
District 4
District 5
Summary of Land Acquisition and New Facility Recommendations
Cost Summary
Future Acquisition and New Facilities

Section 7. Recreation Programming

Existing Offerings
Programming Precedents
Programming Precedents Summary
Programming Recommendations

Section 8. Prioritization, Phasing and Funding Methods

Facility Implementation
Existing Funds
Grants
Benefits

Reference Sources

Appendices

Cash Handling Procedures
Independent Contractor Agreement Form
Fiscal Policies and Procedures for Contractual Services
Contractual Services Request for Payment Form
Fiscal Policies and Procedures for Deposits
Program Worksheet
Deposit Policy and Procedures for Employees
National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) Examples of Park,
Recreation, and Open Space Standards



SECTION I

Introduction



Introduction

Background

In March of 2001, Columbia County published a Request for Proposals (RFP) for a Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan to address the community's recreation delivery system. The scope of services outlined in the RFP focused on providing both active and passive recreation facilities and programs for all citizens of Columbia County while ensuring maximum efficiency and quality of operations.

Purpose of the Planning Process

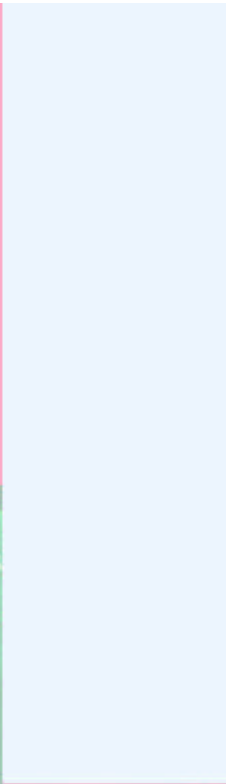
The primary purpose of the project is to assess the needs and desires of Columbia County citizens related to parks and recreation.

The master plan is intended to help the county and the Recreation and Leisure Services Department capitalize on their current strengths while eliminating or minimizing weaknesses. The plan is also intended to identify and maximize opportunities for recreation and to mitigate constraints on staff and elected officials as they respond to citizen expectations.

Planning Methodology

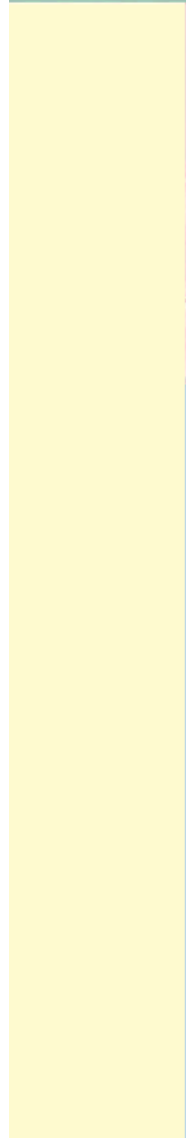
The planning process relies on the participation of county staff, elected officials and citizens. The eventual implementation and success of plan recommendations requires the input of a wide variety of park users including participants in active athletic programs, those with an interest in passive recreation, senior citizens, youth, proponents of the arts and others. The planning process identifies how citizens prioritize desired programs and facilities, and it measures their level of support for specific initiatives. Therefore, it is designed to be as participatory in nature as possible.

The first phase of the planning process consists of a series of personal interviews with staff, members of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board and county commissioners. The consultants also facilitate discussions with other providers of recreation such as the YMCA, the Arts Council and the Sports Council. Concurrently, a citizen's steering committee is formed and an all-day workshop is held to consider recreation delivery system strengths and weaknesses and to identify a list of needed recreation programs and facilities. The steering committee workshop is followed by a series of public meetings where the prioritized needs list is presented to local citizens for review and discussion—the list is then amended based on public input. Following the public meetings, a user survey is mailed to a statistically valid random sampling of county residents—the survey serves a purpose similar to the public meetings on a larger, countywide scale. The survey further tests and refines the program and facility list and provides other valuable information related to fees, new park locations and other issues.



SECTION 2

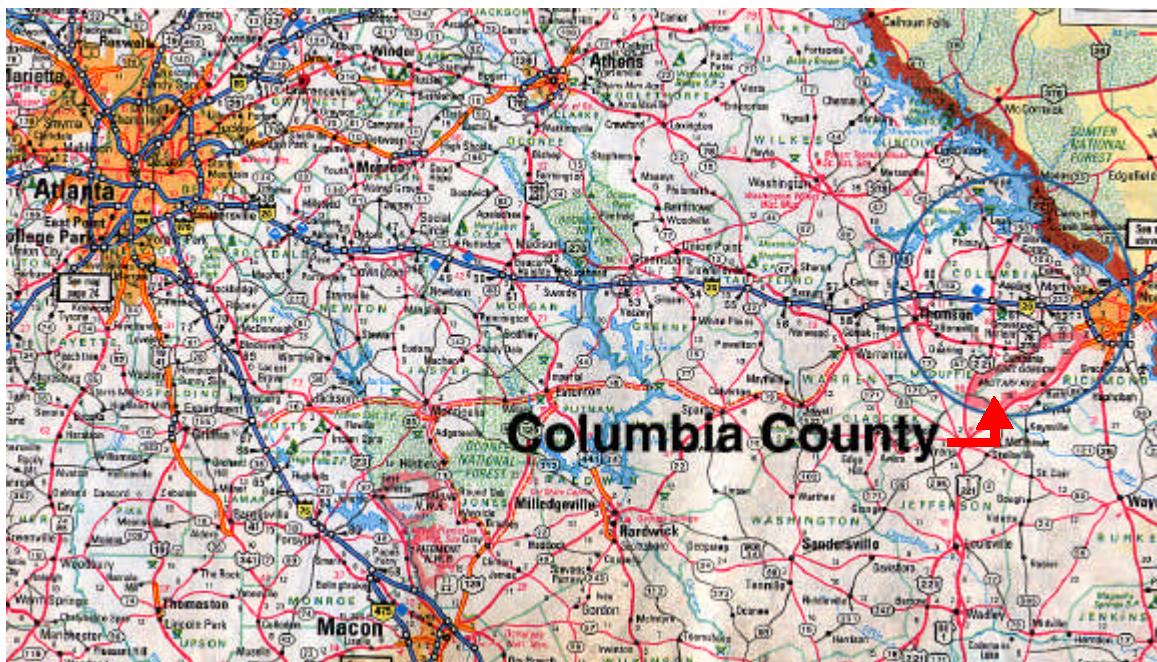
History and Research



History and Research

Columbia County

Columbia County is located in eastern Georgia adjacent to Augusta/Richmond County and the Savannah River on the border of South Carolina. The county is approximately 135 miles east of Atlanta on I-20 and 150 miles north of Savannah. Columbia County's land area is 290 square miles.



Columbia County History

Columbia County was created from northern portions of Richmond County on December 10, 1790 by the Georgia General Assembly. The county, Georgia's 12th, had initially been settled by Baptists and Quaker pacifists opposed to the Revolutionary War. Following the war, other settlers looking for inexpensive land moved into the area, and by the end of the 18th century the county had over 8,000 residents. One hundred and fifty years later it had grown to a population of only 9,500—less than 20% growth in a century and a half. However, Columbia is now the region's fastest growing county.

The 1790 legislation that created Columbia County did not designate a county seat. However, in the early 1790s William Appling donated five acres of land for a courthouse and jail in an area he had settled roughly 20 years before—the community was known as Applington or Appling. In 1816, Appling was incorporated and the community became the official county seat. Over time, population growth has been concentrated in the eastern portion of the county and all Columbia County government facilities are now located in Evans, including the new, soon-to-be-completed Columbia County Courthouse Annex. Appling remains the county seat, but all county business is conducted in Evans.

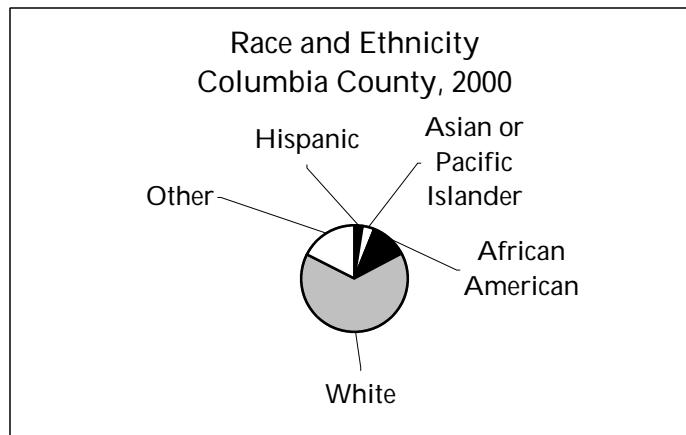
Local Government

Columbia County is governed by a Board of Commissioners; the chairman is elected by the members of the board. In addition to the five commissioners, elected officials include the Probate Judge, Superior Court Judges, Magistrate Court Judge, Sheriff, District Attorney, Coroner, Clerk of Superior Court and the Tax Commissioner. The Board of Commissioners has the authority to appoint citizens to advisory boards and special purpose authorities including the Recreation Advisory Board.

The Columbia County Recreation Advisory Board was developed in the 1970s and has seven members, one from each of the five districts and an additional member from the two largest districts. Each member serves a three-year renewable commitment to the board. The board members hold a monthly open meeting, conduct fundraising activities, review the departmental budget, make recommendations for future park sites, attend employee job interviews and make recommendations to the county commissioners.

Demographic Characteristics

In 2000, Columbia County's population was 89,288. Of that total, 2.6% of the community's citizens were Hispanic; 3.5% were Asian or Pacific Islander; 11.2% were African Americans and 82.7% were white. In contrast, the 2000 Georgia population was 5.3% Hispanic; 2.2% Asian or Pacific Islander; 28.7% African American and 65.1% white.



According to the 2000 Census, Columbia County has 43,630 male residents and 45,658 female residents. The median age is 35.4 years old. 62,858 citizens are over the age of 18; 30,072 are male and 32,786 are female. Of the total population, the percentage that is under the age of 18 equals 29.6%, 14.4% are female and 15.2% are male. Of the Columbia County population, 22.7% are between the ages of 5 and 18 while 9.9% are

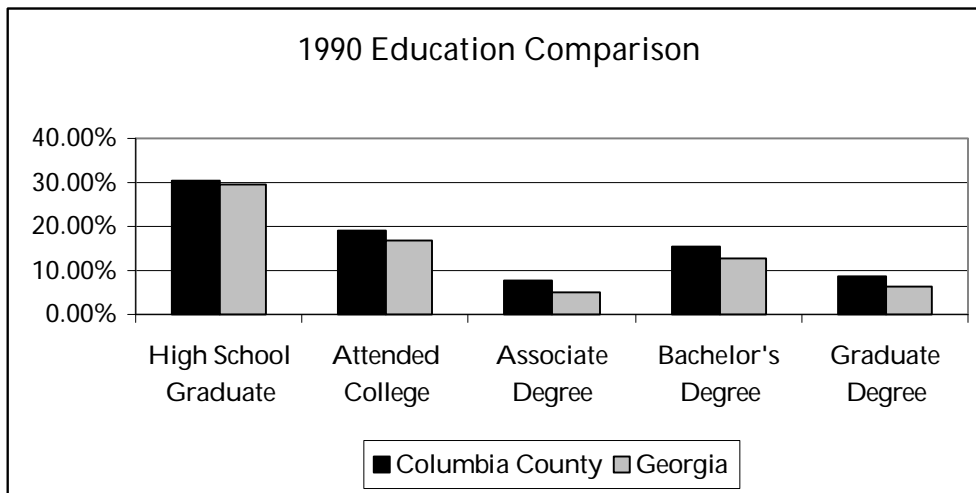
over the age of 62. The remaining 60.5% of the population are between the ages of 18 and 62.

There are 31,120 total households in Columbia County according to the 2000 Census. The average household size in Columbia County is 2.85 people. Of the total population, 99.2% live in households while 0.8% live in group quarters. Households with individuals under the age of 18 totals 14,777 or 47.5% and households with individuals 65 years old and over equals 4,954 or 15.9% of the total households. Family households account for 81.5% of the population and 18.5% are non-family households.

The 2000 U.S. Census recorded 33,321 total housing units. Of these units, 31,120 or 93.4% were occupied leaving 6.6% vacant units. Of the vacant units, 1% were used for

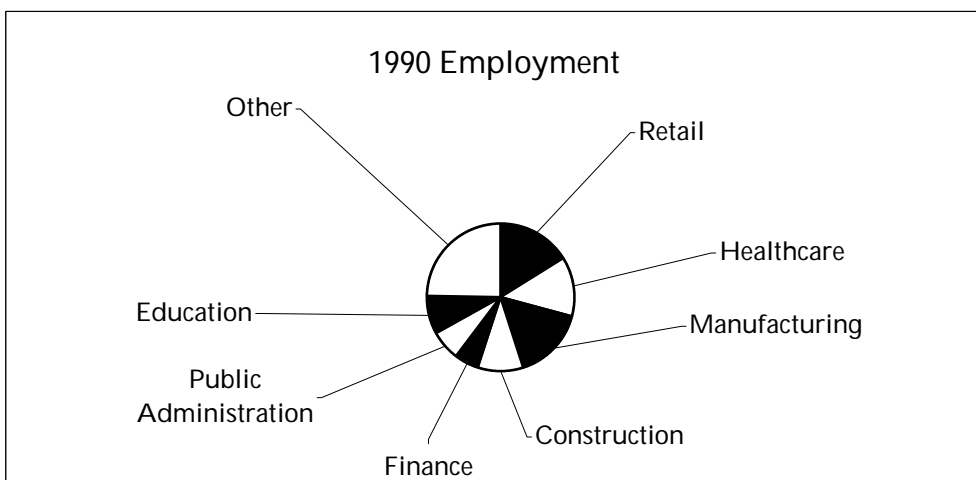
seasonal, recreational or occasional use. Of the occupied units, 25,557 or 82.1% were owner-occupied and 5,563 or 17.9% were renter-occupied. The average household size of owner-occupied units is 2.88 and the average household size of renter-occupied units is 2.69.

In 1990, 40,113 citizens of Columbia County were over the age of 25. Of that total, 7.24% had less than a ninth grade education; 30.51% were high school graduates; 19.21% had attended college but not graduated; 7.53% had received associate degrees; 15.42% had earned bachelor's degrees and 8.45% had received graduate or professional degrees. Overall, in 1990, 12.02% of Georgians had received less than a ninth grade education; 29.65% were high school graduates; 17% had attended college but not graduated; 4.96% held associate degrees; 12.91% received bachelor's degrees and 6.40% had graduate or professional degrees.



In 1990, 32,628 people over the age of 16 were employed in Columbia County. The largest single category of employment in the county was retail trade at 16.17% of the workforce. Other major categories of employment were healthcare and related

professional services (12.95%); manufacturing (15.76%); construction (10.05%); finance and real estate (5.48%); public administration (6.61%) and education and related professional services (8.31%).

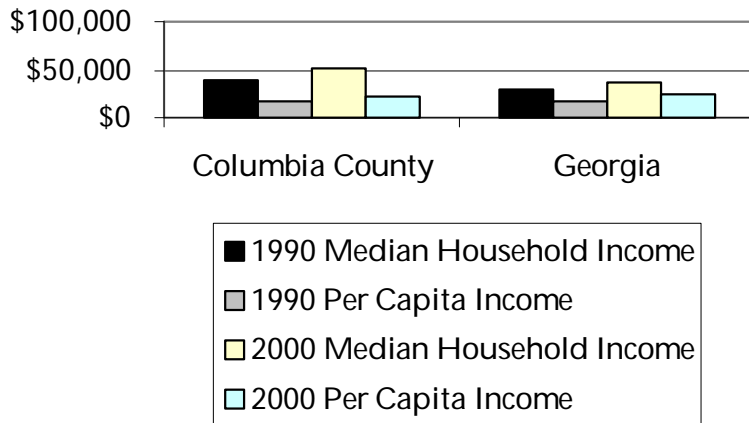


Economic data from the 2000 Census has not yet been published. According to the 1990 Census and Bureau of Economic Analysis, the Columbia County median household income was \$40,122 and the per capita income was \$17,844. In 1990, Georgia's median household income was significantly lower at \$29,021 and the per capita income was \$17,738. In 1997, a model-based estimate calculated that the median household money

income in Columbia County was \$50,345 and the per capita income was \$21,123. Concurrently, in the state of Georgia the median household money income was \$36,372 and the per capita income was \$24,546. In Columbia County, the median family income

has increased by \$10,223 between 1990 and 1997, a 25.4% increase, while the state median family income has increased by \$7,351, a 25.3% increase. Although the averages

Income Comparison



have increased at nearly the same rate, Columbia County surpasses the state average median family income by \$13,973. Most recently, in 1999, the per capita income for Columbia County was \$22,931. In 1999, the state per capita income was \$27,324, ranking Columbia County 33rd in the state.

Columbia County is a prosperous county, ranked 6th in the state based on the 1997 estimate of median household income. Columbia County ranks 7th lowest in the state with only 7.7% of the total population living beneath the poverty level. This statistic reveals that fewer members of the population are eligible for public assistance, Medicaid and food stamps.

Columbia County holds the master economic ranking of 18th in the state with a millage rate of 25.21 and a net property tax digest of \$2,053,194,000.

SELECTED GEORGIA PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENTS FACT SHEET

GEORGIA COUNTY	2000 POPULATION	1999 MILLAGE RATE	NET PROPERTY TAX DIGEST (\$000)	MASTER ECONOMIC RANK	1999 PER CAPITA INCOME	TOTAL PER CAPITA EXPENDITURES
Bulloch County	55,983	20.25	\$ 919,911	37	\$ 19,582	\$ 54.65
Clarke County	101,489	32.45	\$ 1,961,201	17	\$ 24,985	\$ 50.82
Columbia County	89,288	25.21	\$ 2,053,194	18	\$ 22,931	\$ 16.21
Laurens County	44,874	19.63	\$ 1,972,207	38	\$ 20,920	\$ 68.48
Lowndes County	92,115	21.73	\$ 1,798,294	26	\$ 22,760	\$ 26.92
Richmond County	199,775	27.35	\$ 3,583,499	9	\$ 23,980	\$ 62.17
Troup County	58,779	26.21	\$ 1,330,135	30	\$ 24,306	\$ 50.15
Selected County Average	91,758	24.69	\$ 1,945,492	25	\$ 22,781	\$ 47.06

Figure 2.6 illustrates how Columbia County compares to other counties that are recognized across the state as having exemplary parks and recreation departments. Resources for this table

include The Georgia County Guide 2001 and Fiscal Year 2001: Georgia City and County Recreation Services Study.

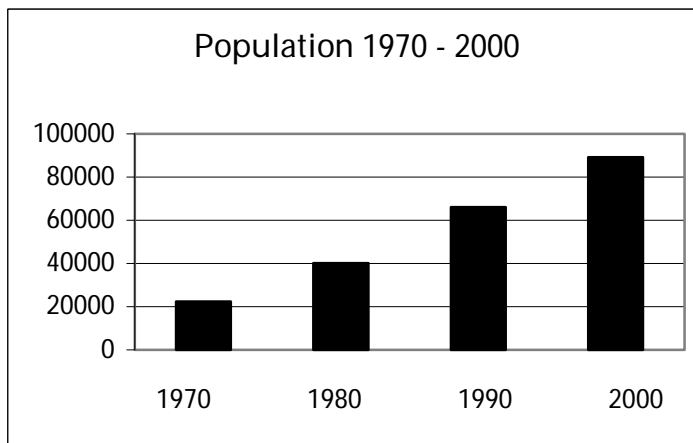
Based on the selected county average, Columbia County has less population, a higher 1999 millage rate, more net property tax digest, a higher master economic rate and average 1999 per capita income. The average total per capita spending for these communities is \$47.06 compared to the \$16.21 for Columbia County. Columbia County is \$10.71 below the spending level of Lowndes County, which is the second lowest county

and the closest in total population. A low level of parks and recreation spending creates a challenge for the recreational professionals to provide diverse programming, state of the art facilities and satisfactory maintenance practices. The following sections of this document will discuss these and other challenges in detail and provide recommendations to improve the services to the citizens of Columbia County.

The impacts of recreation based on the current level of spending are further diminished by a growing population. As the population grows at a rapid rate, the spending for new facilities and staff must keep pace. Population figures and corresponding impacts are discussed in the following sections.

Population Growth

According to the 1990 census, the population of Columbia County was 66,031 persons.



Between 1980 and 1990 the county grew at a rate of 64.6% compared with a state average growth rate of 18.6%. Between 1990 and 2000, the county grew from 66,031 to 89,288 for a growth rate of 35.2%, significantly less than the previous decade but still exceeding the state's overall 1990-2000 growth rate of 26%. Additionally, in 2000, the Augusta-Aiken, GA-SC Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), which includes Columbia County, ranked second in population in the state; only the Atlanta MSA was larger.

1990 – 2000 Growth Areas and Density

For the purpose of small-area geographic studies, the United States Census divides Columbia County into several census blocks. These blocks are then organized into larger categories called block groups. A block group is the smallest geographic area for which the Census analyzes and distributes data.

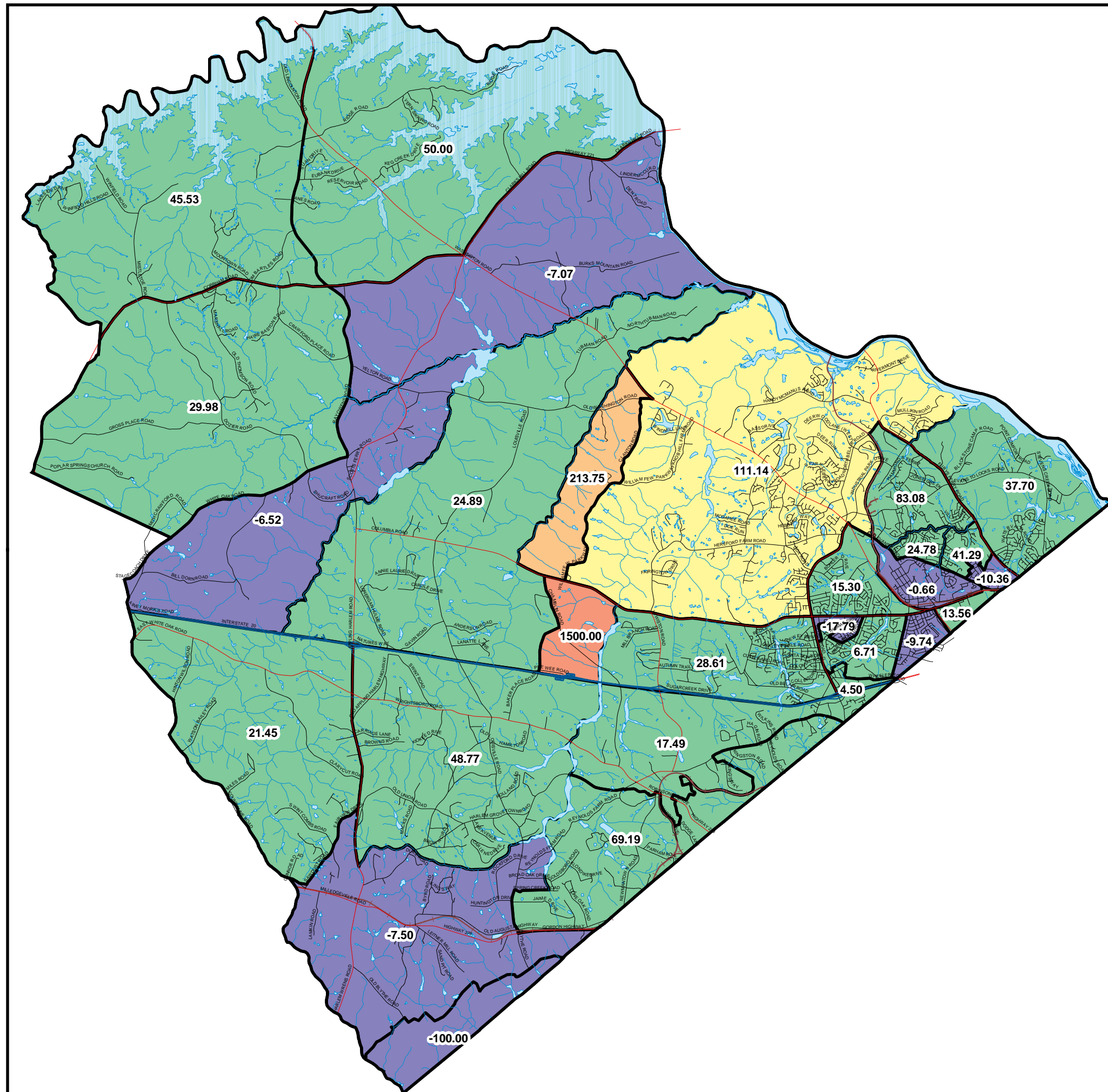
As shown in Figure 02.08, Columbia County experienced areas of decline and areas of growth. The areas of decline, shaded in blue, are located in the eastern, southern and western sections of the county. The most significant area of decline is in the southernmost tip of the county near Fort Gordon. Population increased significantly in the middle of the county near the Interstate 20 corridor and the Evans and Grovetown regions as well. According The Georgia County Guide, between 1990 and 2000, the population in the city of Harlem decreased by 20.2%, the area of Martinez decreased by 17.7%, the area of Evans increased 29.3% and the city of Grovetown increased 58.6%. In 2000, the unincorporated areas of the county accounted for 91.1% of the population, which represents a 35.8% margin of growth between 1990 and 2000.






Figure 02.09 illustrates that the eastern section of the county has the highest population densities. Areas of the county around Martinez have the highest density ranging from 20,000 to 35,000 persons per square mile. In contrast, the western two-thirds of the

Columbia County, GA Parks & Recreation Master Plan

*Percent Change in Population
1990-2000 by Block Group*

Figure 02.08

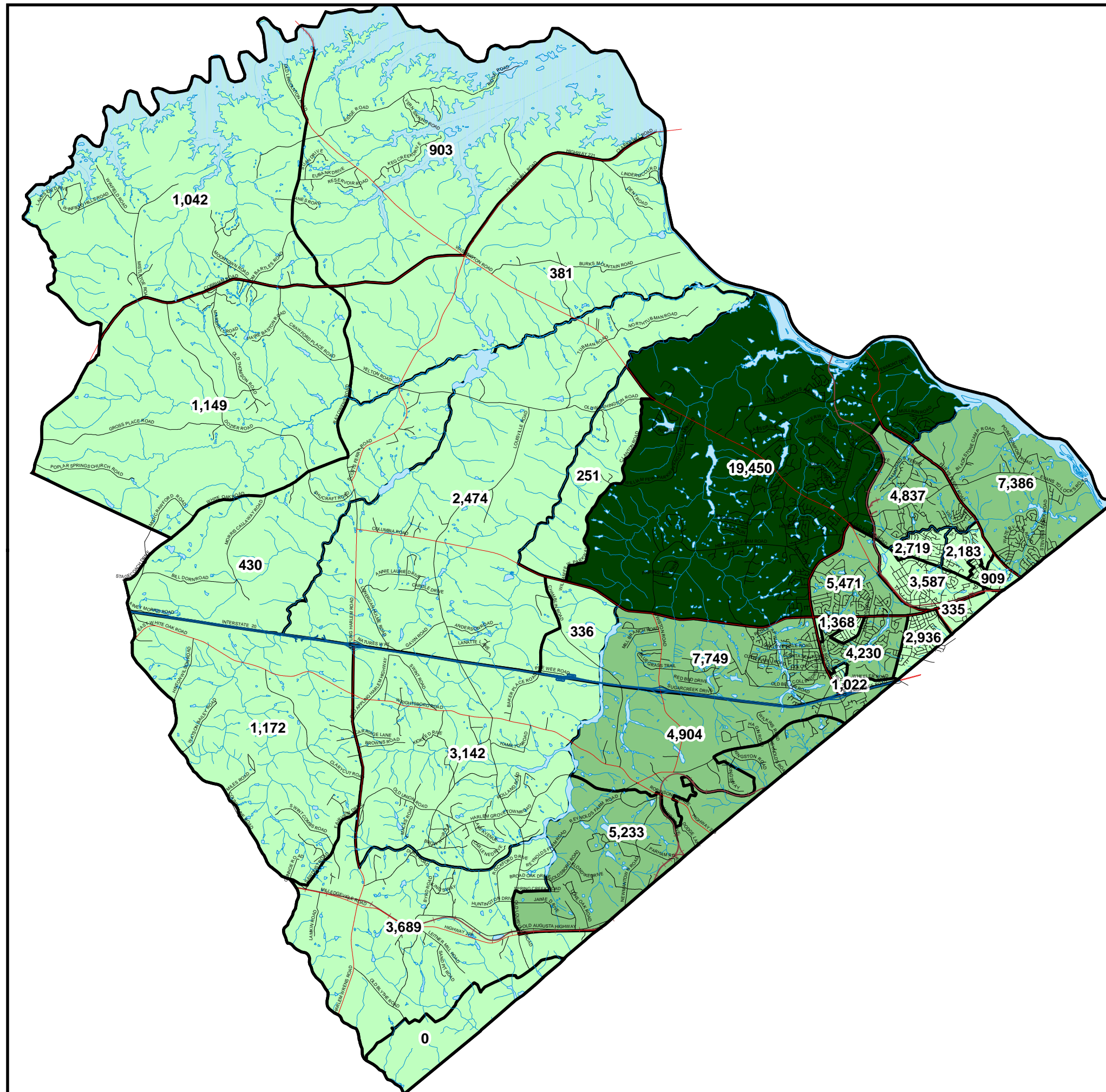





-  -100.00% - 0.00%
-  0.01% - 100.00%
-  100.01% - 200.00%
-  200.01% - 300.00%
-  300.01% - 1500.00%

Columbia County, GA Parks & Recreation Master Plan

Total Population - 2000 (89,288)
by Block Group

Figure 02.09



-  0 - 4,000
-  4,001 - 8,000
-  16,001 - 20,000

county has the lowest population density ranging from approximately 465 to 5,000 persons per square mile. Population growth has leveled off and, in some cases, declined in the areas of highest population density. This is in part the result of changing land use patterns and the aging of residential stock in the area. Growth is now moving north and west of the current population centers toward the Savannah River and central sections of the county near Patriots Park.

Demographic Analysis

Because Columbia County is primarily unincorporated, the responsibility for providing parks and recreation facilities and programs is placed mainly on the county. The City of Grovetown is the only municipality within the county offering park and recreation facilities. The facilities offered aid the county in meeting Grovetown's recreation needs. Program and facility providers, such as the YMCA, private gyms and health clubs and meet some of the indoor recreation program needs, but there remains a demand for additional recreation programs and facilities in the county.

A review of the demographic characteristics of Columbia County reveals an adult population with a near equal ratio of males to females. Over 90% of the population is under the age of 65, with nearly 30% under the age of 18. These statistics suggest the existence of a very high concentration of residents who would participate in organized team sports at one end of the age spectrum while at the other, non-sport programs are needed. Public input suggested a need for increased programs for the adult population. The high percentage of residents around the age of 40 supports the demand for increased programs for that age group.

Although Columbia County has a highly ranked median household income and a low number of citizens living beneath the poverty level, recreation providers in Columbia County should be cognizant of the needs of lower income populations and provide scholarship opportunities accordingly. However, based on the economic statistics of the county, it is appropriate to apply user fees to citizens for most programs. User fees are discussed further in Section 4.

Other users that require special consideration by program and facility providers are single parents and two-parent families where both work outside the home. The time required to transport children to and from recreation activities can be a difficult obstacle to overcome. This restraint is magnified when there is more than one child participating, as is likely the case in most households. The modern reality of two-parent working families, single parent working families and active seniors has increased the demand for both good programming and accessible parks distributed across the county. There is a need for neighborhood parks and interconnecting greenways, which offer easy-access outlets for recreation for all ages.

Previous Planning Efforts

Columbia County began its planning efforts in 1989 with its first Growth Management Plan. This plan was revised in 1994, when it was determined that significant growth and development altered Columbia County to the point where a new growth management plan was required to meet the needs of the county. This led to the latest plan, Forward 2020: Columbia County Growth Management Plan, completed in the year

2000, which was designed for distinct and responsible county growth within the Augusta Metro region. This plan provides helpful information for the use of recreation planning including population projections, existing and future land use plans and demographic profiling information.

Under the Community Facilities and Services chapter, the Park and Recreation section assesses the existing park facilities in Columbia County. The report itemizes the facilities at the eight county community parks, one county regional park, one state park and three community centers. This report recommends that the county focus on increasing neighborhood park facilities, trails, and recreational access to Clarks Hill Lake and the Savannah River. It is mentioned that Columbia County meets the recommended acreage ratio of one field per 1,000 residents and 50 acres of county parkland per 100,000 people. These standards are not congruent with National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) design standards, as discussed in Section 5 of this document. NRPA standards indicate deficits in several facilities.

Forward 2020 suggested locations for purchase of additional county parkland including the Martinez-Evans area, other urbanizing areas and the five identified town centers. The first priority for land acquisition has been set in the Martinez-Evans area and then secondly, the Greenbriar Town Center. The Greenbriar Town Center is one of five locations in Columbia County designated as “town center” on the Forward 2020 Development Opportunities Map. These town centers will serve Columbia County residents with a complementary combination of residential, commercial, service and recreational uses connected with a comprehensive circulation system. The other four town centers are in the process of being developed in the Appling, Evans, Harlem and Grovetown areas. The Greenbriar Town Center will be located within the recent development near the intersection of William Few Parkway and Hardy-McManus Road with Washington Road. As the town center concepts are accomplished, passive open space in the form of a town green should be implemented as planned.

Regarding regional parks, this report indicates that Columbia County is meeting the national standard of 500 acres per 100,000 because of the large Wildwood Park. These standards are not congruent with NRPA national standards, as discussed in Section 5 of this document. Recommendations for this park include development of a multipurpose center or other expanded recreational facilities.